CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

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This series seeks to examine, exemplify and problematise the ways in which childhood and youth are entangled with the Anthropocene. The series is multi-disciplinary—bringing together, drawing on, and exploring various intersections and entanglements between sociologies of childhood, youth, education, work, and wellbeing; children's and young people's geographies; feminist and post-feminist theories and methodologies; and new materialist and post-human theories and methodologies. It engages with an array of critical theoretical, methodological and empirical challenges and opportunities that emerge when thinking about children, young people and the Anthropocene.

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ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD
Lanham • Boulder • New York • London

Published by Rowman & Littlefield
An imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706
www.rowman.com

86-90 Paul Street, London EC2A 4NE

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data on File

ISBN 978-1-5381-5364-2 (cloth)
ISBN 978-1-5381-5365-9 (electronic)

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Acknowledgments

All the chapters in this collection originated in contributions to an international, interdisciplinary conference, held at the University of the Basque Country in Bilbao, Spain, over three days in September 2019. The conference—*Young People, Well-Being, Resilience and Enterprise: Critical Perspectives for the Anthropocene*—aimed to open out the multiple implications of young people with human-induced changes to earth systems changes.

We want to acknowledge the financial, in-kind and logistical support of the following institutions that enabled this conference to take place: Department of Education of the Basque Government; Campus of Biscay Vicerectorate, Faculty of Social Sciences and Communication, Department of Sociology 2 and the Collective Identity Research Centre of the University of Basque Country (Spain); the UNESCO UNEVOC Centre, the School of Education, RMIT University (Australia); the School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, the University of Birmingham (UK); Young Lives Research Lab, York University (Canada); and Bulegoa, Office for Art and Knowledge, Bilbao (Spain).

We would also acknowledge the various contributions of the participants in that conference—the academics, artists and performers—who individually, collectively and in something that in the end was much more than the sum of its parts, produced an event that was provocative, productive and collegial in ways that we would hope for in future gatherings. Many of those participants are contributors to this collection.

Finally, we would also like to express our thanks and gratitude to Georgia Kelly, who provided invaluable support and assistance in project managing many aspects of the editorial process for this volume. Georgia's organisation, patience, good humour and formidable Excel skills have been indispensable in seeing this book to fruition as we have worked across multiple time zones and under the often crazy duress of living and working through the pandemic.

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Young People and Wildfire Disasters

A Capability for Safety?

Ana Sofia Ribeiro

Wildfires have become larger and more frequent in recent times, with devastating consequences for rural people and ecosystems. The most recent examples of wildfire magnitude came from Australia and California in 2020, both setting a record for the worst fire season in their own territories. In Portugal, 15 October 2017 saw two extreme wildfire events that killed over 115 people in the Central region and led to several changes in communities, local and national land planning policies and civil protection and emergency response systems (Freitas and Mendes 2019; Molina-Terrén et al. 2019; San-Miguel-Ayanz et al. 2018).

The Portuguese Central region is mainly a low-density territory in demographic terms; most of its population is old, as young people leave for jobs in coastal areas or abroad. Nevertheless, there are still young people in these areas, namely those under 18 who cannot make independent decisions about their own lives regarding schooling or where to live. Nine of the 115 victims of the 2017 wildfires were under 20 years old (Comissão Técnica Independente et al. 2017, 2018). Moreover, the wildfires had a direct or indirect impact on the young people who survived and still live in these areas, affecting their daily routines, destroying the natural environment where they live, taking the lives of close friends and family and forcing others to relocate. Their sense of basic safety has been challenged, as wildfire disasters generally carry severe impacts for children and young people that affect many aspects of their wellbeing (Towers, Christianson, and Eriksen 2019).

Taking a capability perspective (Nussbaum 2011; Sen 2001) to analyse the quality of life of young people, this chapter argues that it is necessary to conceive a safety capability as a basic capability in analysing lives under disaster situations, which have become far more common in recent years, as we enter the Anthropocene (Eriksen and Ballard 2020; Blok and Jensen 2019; Spannring and Hawke 2021). It begins with an analysis that views relationships between people, land and fire as entangled,

contextualizing them within scientific research on the impacts of wildfires on children and young people in rural areas. It then proposes a safety capability based on the contributions of the human security (Gasper 2010) and environmental applications of the capability approach (Holland 2014). Following this conceptual framework, it presents empirical data collected through interviews with children and young people located in one small Portuguese Central village impacted by the 15 October wildfire, drawing on their accounts of subjective wellbeing and perceptions of territorial recovery upon a year after the wildfire event.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND FIRE: TALES OF BELONGING AND TIES

Relations between fire, land and people are deeply rooted, forged by the need to regenerate a given territory, either through natural cycles or human intervention. Fire is an ambivalent ecological element that has positive effects, such as stimulating growth, but can also harm humans and the environment through air and water pollution or multispecies destruction. In their book *Alliances in the Anthropocene*, Eriksen and Ballard (2020, 299) illustrate the complexity of the bonds between plants, fire and humans through art and narrative interviews with bushfire survivors, telling stories of taming, respect, fighting, loss, ruin and renovation, in which people tend and nurture life but have embodied the uncertainty of its permanence. They explain that 'fire is a central part of ecosystems in the Anthropocene', a natural element which exists to combust, clean and regenerate landscapes; hence, fire suppression as a strategy provokes unbalances, as some trees need fire to reproduce, such as pines (Tsing 2015, 30). However, as much as wildfires are a natural phenomenon, when uncontrolled they result in disaster because of long-term processes of maldevelopment, such as unmanaged forest or defective prevention practices. Hence, wildfires can be seen as disturbance events, 'a change in environmental conditions that causes a pronounced change in an ecosystem' (Tsing 2015, 160). Such changes can be perceived in different lenses, shaped by the nature of change wildfires provoke (e.g., damage or restoration) (Tedim and Leone 2020). The Anthropocene is still an unofficial unit of geological time; its designation is unfortunate in that it reifies masculine dominance and the view of humans as exceptional and central to the world. Instead, considering climate change events, feminist scholars prefer to point out that humans should humble down and enter a dialogical kinship with other species and recognise other sorts of agency (Frost 2016; Haraway 2015; Taylor 2019). Considering these theoretical perspectives, taking a capabilities approach to disasters may seem too human centred, but it is that empirical point of view that is followed here. Disasters are material events with social consequences for those affected, namely, young people's capacity to live and project their lives in the places they inhabit. Wildfires are often caused by human hand, and hence, are anthropogenic and should be seen as social rather than natural events (Chmutina and von Meding 2019; Tedim and Leone 2020).

Since fire is a part of human life, forest fires are a reality generally experienced firsthand in rural areas; they are therefore a unique experience for those living outside major cities. Living in closer contact with nature is generally considered an advantage in terms of wellbeing (Bratman et al. 2019). However, wildfires are an exception to this rule: the impacts of major wildfires can be devastating, particularly for children and young people. A literature review of the topic, in addition to fatalities, injuries and damage to physical health (particularly those associated with smoke and respiratory diseases), Towers et al. (2019) identified severe impacts on mental health and wellbeing, with several studies pointing to small percentages of children presenting symptoms of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, and such impacts can be long lasting. In Greece, Papadatou et al. (2012) discovered that these symptoms increase when associated with loss and damage, such as the death of family members or pets or farm animals or the destruction of the family home. In a literature review on the impacts of disasters on children and young people, Peek et al. (2018) also refer to negative impacts on educational performance caused by absenteeism, relocation or the consequences of negative emotions and mental health issues.

However, children and young people should not be seen only as vulnerable in the face of wildfire disasters. In a previous study on children's drawings associated with the 2017 wildfire in Central Portugal, Ribeiro and Silva (2019) showed that the impacts and reactions to a wildfire disaster also vary according to the children's experience of the wildfire. They observed that children who had direct contact with the fire demonstrated more negative emotions, but also a greater willingness to act, while those who had witnessed the event from afar were more likely to reproduce media reports and had little awareness of their own role in such a situation. Similarly, regarding a wildfire in the Wood Buffalo region of Canada (ResiliencebyDesign Research Innovation Lab 2018), the young people who experienced evacuation and its aftermath developed resilience to the event by reconnecting with each other and taking action to reconstruct and improve their lives in their hometown, demanding, for instance, that public transport should arrive on time.

Young people in rural areas are generally seen as disadvantaged given that they face several challenges associated with mobility, educational and leisure opportunities and work (Butler 2019; Ferreira 2020; Simões, Rocha, and Mateus 2019). This vulnerability can be intensified by an extreme weather event such as a wildfire or storm which destroys already scarce infrastructure and industries. Hence, if the negative impacts of disasters are greater in territories that are already deprived, young people should be given the opportunity to restore their affective ties with the land to recover from these losses. This opportunity could take the form of a safety capability, elaborated in the next section.

SAFETY CAPABILITY: HUMAN SECURITY FROM BELOW

There has been little discussion on the capabilities approach and environmental protection to date given that the capabilities matrix is intrinsically more concerned with individual freedoms and intrapersonal comparisons than with collective justice (Crabtree 2020). According to Sen (2001), a capability is the real freedom an

individual has to do or be whatever it is they have reason to value, even if they choose not to exert that freedom. It is a measure used to evaluate the quality of life that enlarges the informational basis for making such judgments, as it is not only concerned with opportunities but also with access to such opportunities, which may vary according to individual characteristics, institutional factors and environmental settings given that people have different abilities to convert resources into functionings (Robeyns 2017, 17). Hence, while Sen recognises the environment as a potential constraint on exerting one's freedom, his exploration of this conversion factor is limited.

In her version of the capabilities approach as a theory of justice, Nussbaum (2011) goes further in her concern for the environment by including in her list of 10 basic capabilities one that addresses 'other species': 'Being able to live with the full range of creatures and plants that inhabit the world around us. To be able to enjoy nature and appreciate its beauty'. While such definitions seem more concerned with enjoyment of nature than its protection, in other works Nussbaum has presented a strong argument for animal welfare that stresses the human duty to care for the wellbeing of other species (see, for instance, Nussbaum, 2007). Nevertheless, in terms of environmental protection, Holland's (2014) work is the most fulsome to date since it highlights the instrumentality of the environmental balance in the realization of several capabilities. Drawing on the notion of personal conversion factors, Holland gives the example of air pollution and how this affects a child's capability for bodily integrity (to a different degree if the said child is asthmatic), but also their capability for play (in the sense that this requires being able to enjoy recreational activities) and ultimately their capability to develop the senses, imagination and thought through appropriate education (Holland 2014, 87–89). Holland then states that while several studies indicate that environmental distress has a severe impact on those who are already disadvantaged, the environment itself is more than a simple conversion factor and should be taken as instrumental in the development of all aspects of wellbeing. Holland also denies that damage to the environment today because of different individual values can be compensated for tomorrow by a future generation since

> the loss of a tree that is involved in one kind of functioning activity cannot always be compensated for with the protection or use of a tree that is involved in another functioning activity. An accurate approach to valuing the environment will therefore require characterizing the relationship between people and environmental resources in the form these relationships actually take. (Holland 2014, 95)

However, as much as Holland explores environmental protection and its relation to wellbeing, disasters and their impacts are not directly addressed in her theorization of capabilities, particularly in terms of their impact on objective and subjective security. Here, Gasper's (2010) approach to human development in the form of human security provides further insight. Discounting its anthropocentric focus on the human condition, the human security approach is concerned with objective threats to human lives, such as those provoked by terrorism and disasters, but also to the sensitivity to risk that can make individuals feel safe or threatened, regardless of the objective conditions that provide this security. Hence, there are two dimensions to this concept: one more political, concerned with social structures, normative thresholds, and limits to security, and the other more human, concerned with embodiment and associated emotions such as fear, which reminds us of our visceral feelings. Therefore, the human security concept is holistic in the sense that it extends beyond approaches to basic needs and rights and prioritises stability while seeking change and improvements to substantial freedoms (with normative limits both below and above).

Based on this concept of human security I would therefore like to propose the central safety capability as a minimum requirement for wellbeing. Although bodily integrity and emotions, two of the capabilities referred to in Nussbaum's list, can subsume the two dimensions of the human security concept previously detailed, they do not account for exogenous threats that affect opportunities for human safety, which can be defined as feeling some measure of predictability and control over one's life. For Bondi (2014, 332), 'a sense of ontological security is a psychological achievement that enables most people, most of the time, to take for granted—to trust—that our ordinary, everyday worlds are reliable and dependable'. This idea, which minimizes the vulnerability inherent to our human condition (Fineman 2008), operates by approximations at different stages of our lives, as the idea of security is quite embodied and dependent on personal circumstances and resources (Hopkins et al. 2018).

In the case of children, young people and the environment, the impact of experiencing a disaster at a transitional age can become a critical event that defines one's course of life and severely impacts the way in which a young person relates to their own landscape in terms of emotional relationality and individual valuation. Even though children and young people have limited agency (and consequently, limited power to choose) due to their age, recent youth demonstrations for ecological action, such as Fridays for Future, have shown that it is reasonable to admit that the opportunity to be safe should also include the ability to fight for one's future security, in the light of intergenerational justice (Nissen, Wong, and Carlton 2020; Page 2007). In a human development framework, the safety capability could be formulated as 'being able to feel subjective and objective control over one's environment; being able to express feelings and establish affective relations with one's landscape, including its non-human inhabitants; being able to actively care for and participate in the protection of one's environment'. This definition will be useful in the analysis of young people's accounts of wildfire disaster and how this has impacted their relations with their territory in their everyday lives.

METHODOLOGY

The case study presented here refers to one municipality impacted by an extreme wildfire event which took place on 15 October 2017 as part of several firestorms occurring in Central Portugal that year, partially caused by a climatic condition (Storm

Ophelia), which combined with severe drought and high temperatures, caused multiple ignitions to develop quite rapidly in several municipalities in the Central and Northern regions of the country. An extreme wildfire event can be characterised by patterns related to the fire itself, such as intensity, velocity and spotting scale, and by its physical and psychological effects on people and civil protection personnel (Tedim, Leone, and Mcgee 2019). In all the extreme fire events that developed between 15 and 22 October in the country, 51 people died and several houses, animals, industrial systems and small businesses were destroyed (Viegas et al. 2019). The municipality in question has around 8,000 inhabitants and was affected by an extreme wildfire event that started in Lousã on 15 October and 'developed almost freely to the north, traveling about 60 km in less than 20 hours, leaving a track of more than 50,000 ha of burned area, mostly shrubland and forest (pine and eucalyptus), and causing 14 fatalities' (Ribeiro et al. 2020, 39). Although this municipality had no casualties, the fire burned about 4,050 hectares of land, corresponding to almost half the territory, and destroyed 60 houses.

This case study is based on ethnographical on-site observation involving five interviews with key local actors and 20 interviews with young people, aged between 11 and 25 years old, belonging to local non-governmental organisations and community associations, such as environmental volunteers and firefighter children and youth clubs. Focusing on experiences from children who had knowledge about wildfires was important not only for data quality but also for ethical reasons, as children should be asked about topics they feel comfortable with and that are of their interest (Maglio and Pherali 2020). The interviews with young people occurred in 2019 and 2020, approximately one and a half years after the event. The sample was gender balanced and approved by the ethics committee of the University of Lisbon Institute of Social Sciences. Privacy was assured by keeping the identity of the participants anonymous and not disclosing the location of the site used in the study. Formal consent was obtained from parents when required (for participants under 18 years old) and from the young people themselves. Given the sensitivity of the topic and the possibility that it could trigger traumatic memories, the participants were informed that they could refuse to discuss any topic if they did not feel comfortable. Hence, the participants maintained control over the interview and could choose to reveal emotions and stories as they felt safe to do so. Nevertheless, my own previous experience of working with vulnerable young people and other disaster studies conducted with young populations proved helpful in undertaking the more intense encounters (Fothergill and Peek 2015; Gibbs, MacDougall, and Harden 2013; Mort, Rodríguez-Giralt, and Delicado 2020; Ribeiro and Silva 2019). A second phase of the study included a visual exploration of the territory, in which young people would send pictures of their everyday life. Unfortunately, this was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. As only a few participants sent photographs, these will not be included in the analysis.

The interviews were coded choosing a thematic analysis strategy aided by computer software, focusing on impacts on wellbeing and subjective perceptions of security.

LIVING THROUGH THE FIRE: FIGHTING ASHES AND SMOKE

For many of these youngsters, the 15 October wildfire was the first one they had witnessed. Living in an area prone to wildfire had taught them about the risks through stories and knowledge transmitted by their parents and via the media. Concerning her relationship with fire, Teresa, 12 years old, states:

> I never really liked fire and burning things . . . from what I see in films, and I know not all of it is true, and now with things that happened recently, I can understand that things I see in films are real and can happen. I was so frightened when the fire was near my house . . . we have forest around my house, I was not there helping to put out the fire, my parents did not let me, obviously . . . there was a lady that had to move, her house was totally burned down.

Teresa's father is a firefighter and was able to protect her. However, because of the magnitude and speed of the fire, some young people had to fight the fire themselves to help their families. Rui, 14, tells this story:

> I was with my cousin because my brother is a firefighter and was out on duty. We were coming out of the café heading to our house so that the fire wouldn't reach it since there is a gas station nearby. My father could get through by car, but when we started to walk, we realised that we wouldn't make it. . . . We tried a different route home, but soon we were surrounded by fire. We were lucky we found an empty holiday house with a hose; we could connect it and protect ourselves and the house until we could get out of there. When we reached our house, everything around was burned. There was a trailer there, some things had exploded inside. We could put it out because my grandmother, who lives nearby, keeps water in small tanks.

For many, this was a critical moment that they will not forget. Inês, 11, recalls:

> I was with my grandmother, who has a respiratory illness. She lives in a building quite near a small forest. With some sparks from the fire around us, it all started to burn. And I was panicking, my grandfather is also ill but was also out helping people with the fire, and I was alone with my granny and couldn't do anything. I was crying and asking her to call my parents!

After the fire, some were angry because they felt they had been left alone, as there was not enough water (it was a year of severe drought) or firefighters to help them. Although young people feel that after this experience they would be better prepared for a similar event, as they would know what it is like, they also think older people should be helped. Susana, 16 years old, states:

> I would be prepared . . . I mean, you can never really be prepared . . . but I was more afraid before this wildfire, now I know what it will be like . . . young people can help older people by trying to remain calm, going to the firefighting centre, distributing

meals and water. . . . There were some firefighters that were insulted and threatened, it shouldn't be like that, everyone must try to help.

When asked about what changed after the fire, one of the first things mentioned was the landscape. Luís, 14 years old, noted: 'The forest, the trees the green colour. Before the fire we could see all the hills, everything was green. Now it looks like hell, the end of the world'. However, many state that they have not seen much change in peoples' behaviour. Alice, 13 years old, lived through both the 2017 wildfire disasters: the one in Pedrogão in June and the one that started on 15 October. She is quite critical: 'I think this fire changed a lot for some people, but not for others. I don't know . . . I think people should be more careful with things. Such as cleaning the forest and grass. Because now (in 2019), everything is the same or worse'.

FEELING SAFE AFTER DISASTER

Although young people in rural areas miss some of the opportunities of living in a more urban area, there are some advantages that they all recognize: space and less pollution. Teresa, 12 years old, likes living in her small village: 'I like living where I am, in a small, quiet village, with nice, kind people. . . . In a city there is much more confusion, pollution in the air because of the cars. . . . Although I can't do it, here I see a lot of people walking, cycling, and that is good, getting some air'. Vanda, 18 years old, who commutes to study fashion design in a nearby city, mentions noise and space when comparing living in the country with the city: 'It's different, it's all much more . . . narrow. Things are close together here, but you always must walk at least 10 minutes. There, I take 5 minutes to reach the bus station. I listen to cars buzzing, angry people. . . . I feel that things are too close'.

Although some have limited autonomy for exploring their surroundings due to being too young to drive or not being allowed to walk alone, young people derive peace and enjoyment from nature. For Vítor, 14, this is the best aspect of living in a rural area: 'Contact with nature . . . we are basically free . . . there is much less pollution than in the city . . . here there are basically fields that older people cultivate . . . It's bad that not many young people live here, but we can have some fun anyway'. The freedom that Vítor refers to comes from a subjective sense of security, reinforced by closeness to nature, which inspires feelings of peace and control over the environment.

Filipa, 13 years old, witnessed the two major wildfires of 2017, as she relocated with her mother that year. For her, the new village feels safe because 'feeling safe is being able to do what I want with no interference'. Most of the young interviewees feel safe in this small village where there are only neighbours and people they know and the everyday routines are stable. For Ivo, 15 years old, who plans to leave for a big city, this is one the few good things about living in a small area: 'Nothing happens here, so I can go and meet people alone . . . mums do not think of that as potentially dangerous . . . there are foreign people, but in general'.

When asked about places where they feel safest, the young people generally referred to home and school. Considering places where we could feel safe in the event of a wildfire, Luís, 14 years old, declared: 'I mean, I don't feel so safe at my place because some places around did not burn. There are spots up there with many trees still alive and green . . . at my grandmothers' house I felt safe because there is not so much vegetation around . . . and a small backyard'.

Hence, while nature and forests provide recreation and wellbeing, they have an ambiguous status regarding disaster situations, as being in a house farther away from the forest was indicated as a safe option. It is worth noticing that although the extreme wildfire disaster was disturbing, they continue to feel safe in this small village. Inês, 11, puts it into perspective, saying 'I feel safe here because there have never been things so terrible as the hurricanes in America, despite the bad things that did happen' (referring to the 15 October wildfire and Storm Leslie, which occurred a year later, destroying roofs, equipment, crops and trees).

DISCUSSION

As can be understood from the narratives of the children and young people, the wildfire disaster of 2017 was a milestone, signalling a transition between living in a peaceful idyllic setting to one that could turn into a threat in just a few hours. It may in some cases be fair to say that this event also marked a transition from being protected to protecting oneself and others, yet another transition at an age that is already identified with this. For many, the only previous contact they had had with disasters was mediated through television and fiction, which is particularly visible in the accounts of younger children. Some youngsters faced the wildfire themselves not because they were officially allowed but because circumstances demanded that they had to do so. Here, there were no significant gender differences, as both boys and girls reported narratives of self-defence. On hearing about this adventure from classmates and friends, others regret they were not given the same opportunity to prove their resilience, even though they were afraid. Some children were also in danger not because they were close to the fire but because they had been left with older people who were not entirely physically fit. In fact, in rural areas, young people and the elderly generally spend a lot of time together because they do not work. In disaster situations, they can be put under the same roof for protection, as they are usually considered vulnerable. While this is generally seen as a protective measure in disaster situations, if a wildfire reaches a house or shelter, it is the young people who are physically the fittest to deal with it. Hence, teaching some self-protection measures to help them cope with similar situations would be very beneficial and would enhance the self-preservation aspect of their safety capability.

The wildfire also affected their relationship with the territory, visible for instance in their ties to the land. Almost all young people appreciate time spent in nature, enjoying the greenery, silence, and fresh air, which they recognise has a positive impact on

their wellbeing. This was partially destroyed by the wildfire disaster, both during the event and in the aftermath, due to toxic smoke and in the medium to long term, the time needed for forests to regenerate. However, even though nature and its benefits were curtailed, young people still retain a basic sense of security in their home territory due to the preservation of their freedom and silence; although disasters now seem more frequent, 'they are not like the hurricanes in America' and the countryside remains a peaceful place. Hence, their ability to establish affective relations with their landscape remained stable. However, many expressed a concern to protect the environment in their daily lives and see a link between people caring for the land by clearing and pruning vegetation and major wildfires, perhaps sparked by the mass public awareness campaign for clearing land launched by the Portuguese government.

Analysing the former interviews in light of a capability for safety requires to recall its threefold dimension: the autonomy dimension, defined as being able to feel subjective and objective control over one's environment; the emotional dimension, defined as being able to express feelings and establish affective relations with one's landscape, including its non-human inhabitants; and finally, its civic dimension, defined as being able to actively care for and participate in the protection of one's environment. From the point of view of autonomy and objective control over one's surroundings considering these wildfire disasters, such control was unattainable or limited, at best, for children and young people. Their families, standing as their primary reference for material and emotional security, were also caught unprepared and vulnerable, forcing some young people in some cases to act on their own protection and that of their families, by fighting the fire directly as adults. Considering the emotional dimension, it comes as no surprise that witnessing a disaster of such magnitude can trigger embodied memories and feelings of fear, anger, doubt and sadness. Some of the children and young people interviewed revealed having been impacted in the following days by some of these emotions, although they were readily supported by their parents and by local firefighters who worked in the young firefighters' club. Even a year and a half after the event, some youngsters revealed fear of being close to forest areas, for they are more prone to burn. Others expressed strong anger towards adults who were not mindful of their risk behaviors or who did not seem to care about nature. However, positive feelings towards their home village remained intact, as is visible in their accounts about feeling safe and secure due to the quiet and open spaces. Such positive feelings are also at the root of their critical views towards adults and their apparent lack for concern for environmental protection. Nature is perhaps the single aspect they value as more positive when comparing themselves with city-living peers. In that sense, this wildfire disaster, as the first one, could constitute an opportunity to fulfil the civic dimension of safety, by allowing children and young people to have a say and participate in their communities, promoting their safety and protecting the environment. They see themselves as capable and more aware after this first disaster and even point to some constructive and safe forms of how to participate, such as preparing meals. It is then necessary to provide in their own spaces, such as schools and other community institutions, the necessary opportunities for them to be heard and included in local disaster risk reduction plans.

CONCLUSION

A capability for safety can be a conceptual tool useful to analyse these young people's experiences with disasters and consider whether their needs are being met in relation to their security. More than a material resource, environment is indeed a conversion factor for this capability, as well as others, and disasters, as manifestations of unbalanced nature under insufficient care, are serious disruptive events that call for social responsabilisation and action.

Taking disasters as social rather than natural events does not mean to look for great narratives that reinforce the control of humans over nature in the unintended consequences of his actions, but rather to consider what is there to do to protect young people who did not have a say in such matters and that should be given the opportunity to be safe, as capable agents. As Tsing (2015) states, narratives of modernist progress privilege a future that often impedes us to notice the present time. But if the future is no longer ours, young people's present should be granted with care, considering intergenerational justice that Fridays for Future and other movements seek to demand. Certainly, young people's agency is ecologically and social embodied and embedded (Spannring and Hawke 2021), and the recognition of the environment as a meta capability supports that relationality.

Finally, the issues of visibility and special justice must also be considered when evaluating the opportunities for safety of young people that live in rural areas. While these young people are more exposed to the consequences of extreme weather events, the great climate strikes and demonstrations do not take place in villages, so how can young people in rural areas express their concerns about the protection and care of their own land? After the 2017 wildfire, a group of children aged between 5 and 14 sought to sue 47 European countries for damages related to these disasters. They argue that lack of attention to climate change is threatening their right to life[1] and demand that countries commit to lowering greenhouse gas emissions by 65% by 2030. The case has already been accepted by the European Court; maybe it can pave the way for a future that ensures human security.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work is funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology under the grant CEECIND/01198/2017.

1. https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/portugese-children-seek-to-sue-47-countries-over-climate-change-1.3232912.

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3

Confident, Creative and Enterprising Young People?

The School Strike for Climate and Lessons for Australian Education

Meave Noonan and James Goring

In contemporary Australia, and in many of the other 'over-developed' economies of the EU/OECD, discourses of young people's enterprise and innovation provide a counter-narrative to the prevailing material and symbolic consequences of industrial decline, job losses, digital disruption and environmental crisis. The discussion that we develop in this chapter emerges from two genealogical PhD research projects that consider the ways in which young people, the futures they face and the skills they need, are conceived in Australian education, training and labour market discourses. We describe the kind of young person that is imagined in key documents such as the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe)* (Council of Australian Governments Education Council 2019) and *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 2008) and the Foundation for Young Australians' *New Work Order* series (2015–2020), as being best equipped to deal with the present and possible future disruptions of human and environmental systems. These documents produce a dominant narrative that young people should become 'confident', 'creative' and 'enterprising' (among a range of other skills and dispositions) to navigate these challenges and changes.

Throughout this chapter, however, we highlight some of the limits of governing young people as needing to develop forms of confidence, creativity and enterprise conceived through neoliberal market logics which seek to produce individualised forms of responsibility and action. We describe some of the key moments in the emergence of the School Strike for Climate (SS4C), including reactions to the movement by politicians and media personalities, to illustrate tensions in policy aimed at young people and their skills. We argue that the collective actions of the young people involved in the SS4C demonstrate forms of confidence, creativity and enterprise which 'dissent' from these dominant enterprise discourses and present